

Testimony on Higher Education Budget

To Chair Gregg Amore and the Education Subcommittee of House Finance,

I am a faculty member at Rhode Island College and am currently serving as the Chair of RIC's College Council. I am writing today to push for the state's appropriation for Rhode Island College to be increased by \$5.9 million to RIC's original budget request of \$58.1 million.

I would like to focus my testimony on the issue of RIC's tuition, which continues to increase because of the decline in support from the state, thereby increasing the financial burden on our students. Our relatively low tuition has long been one of our more obvious strengths, and one of our greatest appeals is that we have been more affordable than most other four-year institutions in the region. Indeed, I direct the Film Studies Program at RIC, which for two years in a row has ranked among the top ten film programs in the whole country in terms of affordability—and the most affordable program in New England—by affordableschools.net. (We are ranked the #12 best program overall in the nation by intelligence.com and 38th in the nation by study.com.) I fear that we will lose our affordability ranking with next year's tuition hike. RIC's affordability was a large part of what helped us secure the #3 ranking in New England this past year for social mobility among public four-year colleges by *U.S. News and World Report*, which also ranks us in the top 20 of Northeast regional comprehensives in students graduating with the least amount of debt.

RIC operates on incredibly lean margins. Our lower tuition means that our tuition revenue simply adds up to much less money—with much smaller financial flexibility and cushioning—than other institutions. RIC has not done what many other institutions across the country have done to grow their budgets by trying to appeal to international and farther afield out-of-state students. Instead, we have remained committed to the state and the immediate region. 85-90% of our students are from Rhode Island, and—as you well know—our graduates stay in Rhode Island, with more than 40,000 alumni living in the state.

Because of our financial situation, more than 50 people were laid off at RIC over the past year—on top of dozens of faculty, staff, and administrative positions left open and/or lost. While certainly this is an alarming number in and of itself, these are our dear colleagues and our dear friends—who worked with and alongside us to teach our students and support our students and they helped to make RIC the high-quality and accessible institution that it is. The effectiveness of our institution—the institution overall—is imperiled without greater support.

RIC absolutely is an engine of social mobility and economic vitality for the state. The increasing diversity of our student population shows the present and future demographics of this state, but we cannot support these students if we do not have a sufficient budget and force a higher burden on our students.

Please add \$5.9 million to the budget appropriation for Rhode Island College. Doing so is in the best interest of our students and the best interest of our state.

**Thank you,
Vincent Bohlinger, Ph.D.
Chair, Council of Rhode Island College
Professor & Director of Film Studies
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